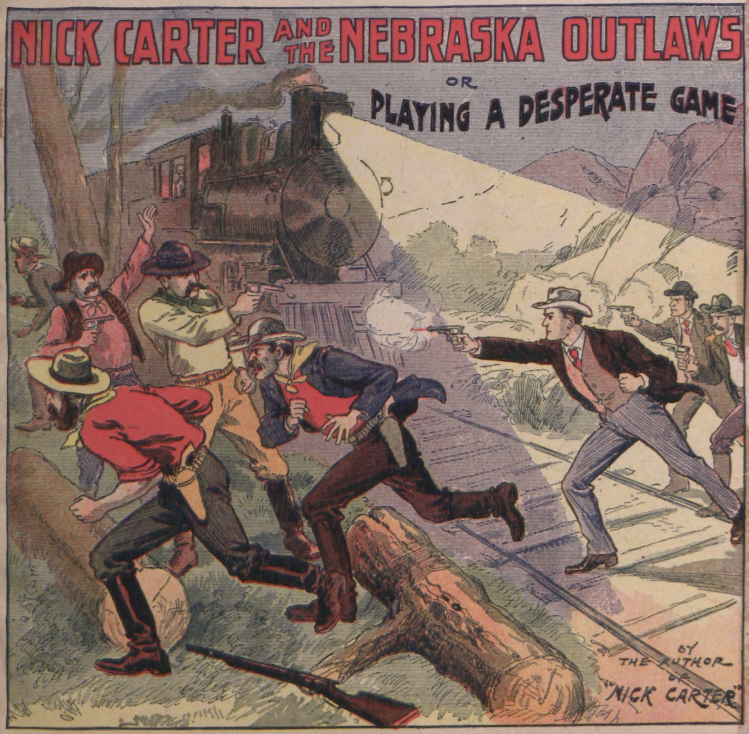
NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 369. Price, Five Cents.

NICK CARTER AND THE NEBRASKA OUTLAWS

OR PLAYING A DESPERATE GAME



Before they could recover from their momentary terror, for the bravest men will be panic-stricken under certain circumstances, the detectives, led by Nick Carter, swooped down on them.

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No. 369. NEW YORK, January 23, 1904. Price Five Cents.

Nick Carter and the Nebraska Outlaws;

OR,

PLAYING A DESPERATE GAME.

By the author of "NICHOLAS CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

THE "LIMITED" HELD UP.

The "Transcontinental Limited" was making up time.

The great drive-wheels of the greatest engine in the West were revolving at a fearful rate of speed, and the landscape was slipping by as though it, too, was traveling along, drawn by a fast train.

The passengers—those who were still awake—were aware that terrific speed was being attained, for the Pullman cars rocked and jolted over the rails.

The trainmen were walking anxiously through the cars, hoping that Wilson, the engineer, would slow up for the curves, which were too sharp for such a heavy train to pass over with safety.

The train had been detained at a siding to allow a freight to get off that section of track.

The freight had been overloaded, and the engine was an old one with leaky tubes, and had had difficulty in making the grade before the next siding.

So, when the "Limited" at last was allowed to go ahead, it was over half an hour late.

The next siding was the last before entering the run into Omaha, which was about fifty miles long.

Beyond the siding the prairie gave place to dense woods, which continued almost to Omaha.

As the "Limited" passed the freight at the siding, its conductor, Harry Parker, turned to the head brakeman, and said:

"Well, Wilson made up the time all but ten minutes."

"Yes, and we'll get in on time," answered his subordinate.

"He's a good engineer, if ever there was one."

"Oh, yes, he's all right, but there's no risk he won't take."

"What this company wants is time, and he certainly makes it."

"There's no doubt of that."

The train was still making time, but the jolting was almost gone now.

They had entered the last block of track before reaching Omaha, and, as they had almost made up the few minutes they were still behind time, Wilson, the engineer, was letting the great machine take it a little easier.

Parker, the conductor, sank into one of the seats in a tourist sleeper and began to think of home.

He had a wife and children in Omaha, and that city was the end of his run, and he was glad to think of it.

His dreams were rudely interrupted the next moment.

The sharp report of torpedoes on the tracks jarred the air, and the next second the brakes almost jerked the great train off the track.

They were on a down grade, and as the train slipped the engineer jammed the "emergency" on, and with one or two jerks it stopped.

Parker rushed to the door of the car, thinking that there must be a wreck ahead.

Frantically he pulled it open and jumped to the ground.

As he was starting toward the engine there was a shot, and then a whole volley rang out.

The bullets whistled along the side of the train, tiny spurts of flame showing from whence they came.

The guns were at the express car, and with a feeling of dismay Parker realized that it was a hold-up.

He flattened himself alongside of the car, thinking of the money in the express car behind the engine.

Then he commenced creeping forward.

"Halt, halt, there you! Get back into the car!" came a hoarse voice from the darkness.

Parker stood still, hoping that he had not been seen and that some one else was being spoken to.

"You. I mean you—damn you! Do you hear me?"

Parker had no doubt now.

"All right, all right, I will," he answered.

"Get a hurry on you, and tell all those women in the cars to have their valuables ready. We are coming through when we've finished that infernal express messenger."

Parker was on the platform now. He looked for the owner of the hoarse voice, and, as he did so, pulled his gun.

However, he thought better of it. To shoot would mean death, and he would have gained nothing.

Reluctantly he entered the car.

Within all was confusion. Women screaming, and men staring white-faced out of the berths.

"What is it? What is it?" they asked.

"I am sorry to say that we're held up," answered Parker.

"Held up! held up!" they answered, in amazement.

"Yes, and a gentleman with a big gun asked me to tell the ladies and others to have their valuables ready."

"But we don't want to lose them—we don't want to lose our money," wailed the women.

"That's why I am telling you to get them ready. Don't you understand?"

"Yes, yes, we know." And then each one began to hide whatever he or she valued.

It was rather a peculiar sight. Many put their watches in their shoes, and a great number ripped open their mattresses and hid their wallets in the hair.

Parker went to the next car and repeated his warning.

His advice was taken, and he entered the third car at the end of the train.

Here he was answering the frightened questions of the women. One asked him what he meant when he said to hide their things. "Where can we hide them?" she begged.

"You know best," and he got out his pocketknife and started to rip a small hole in a mattress.

"There, put them in there—that's the best. Oh, God! Oh!" and he pitched forward at her feet shot through the head.

One of the bandits watched him from the platform as he told the passengers to hide their valuables, and in his rage had lost his head and shot through the door and killed him.

A second later the bandit burst into the car

"So, that's the game, is it?" he demanded.

He stood there with a six-shooter in each hand, and scowled at the now terrified passengers.

"Every one of you shell out, and be quick about it—damn quick!" he ordered.

"Every one of you bring your watches and money here and put it on this berth, and if I see any one doing any monkey bus—— Ah! you would, would you?" and he shot once along the aisle.

The report was followed by a cry, and three fingers and a gun dropped to the floor near the last berth.

There was silence for a moment, broken only by the sobbing of the women.

"Get a move on you with that dough," he commanded.

There was no waiting now. Every passenger collected his or her little valuables and, one by one, brought them and laid them on the berth.

One portly old man in flowered silk pajamas put only a thin-looking wallet on the berth.

"None of that, none of that!" the bandit exclaimed. "Come up with your money. I won't stand any funny games like that," and, to emphasize his statement, he shot once over the old man's head. When he came up in a second or two a roll of bills and a diamond-studded watch were added to the pile.

"That's more like it. Is that all?" asked the robber.

"Yes, sir, that's all," answered the millionaire.

"Any one else? Any one else?" asked the outlaw. "Seems to me that number seven there didn't come up. Come up now or I'll shoot."

There was a hurried scramble of feet, and a haggard old man came out of the berth with his watch and pocketbook in his hand.

He walked up the aisle looking at the robber with a fixed stare.

The bandit wore a mask of some black material, and his skin showed the deep tan of exposure.

He looked at the old man once and then again, and his face slowly became white, and the hands holding the murderous weapons trembled.

"My boy, my boy!" the old man said. "To think that you have come to this. Oh, my boy! It will kill your mother!"

"What, what are you talking about, old man?" asked the fellow, very roughly.

"Oh, Jim."

"Stop that guff. Put your money in your pocket and get back to your berth. Hustle, now!"

The old man put his hand out to take the man's hand, but the guns stood between them.

"Get out or I'll shoot; get out!" ordered the bandit.

The rest of the car were watching them quietly and with wonder in their eyes. The body of the conductor lay in a great pool of blood, and all eyes were strained, watching.

The father stood for a moment as though petrified, and then reached out his hands again.

"Back, back or I'll shoot!" the son said, and raised his revolvers.

For a moment father and son regarded one another, and those nearest could see the fingers tighten on the triggers of the weapons.

The hammers of the pistols were slowly raising when the door of the car opened and another of the bandits gang came in.

"Well, what's this tea-party?" he demanded.

"Oh, nothing."

"Have you got all the plunder?"

"Yes, I guess so."

"Well, let's get out of here."

With a parting glance at his heartbroken father the wayward son gathered up the spoil and went out, followed by the other robber who took time to say before he shut the door:

"If any of you move from this car for half an hour he'll get shot."

CHAPTER II.

THE EXPRESS CAR.

In the meantime the express car was being broken into, and the safe which contained no less than one hundred thousand dollars rifled.

When the train slowed down the engineer jumped from the cab to see what was the matter.

As his feet reached the ground the butt of a heavy

revolver struck him on the head, and he fell without a cry.

The same instant one of the bandits climbed into the cab and covered the fireman, and made him throw up his hands.

Immediately ropes were produced, and he was tied so that he was helpless, and, to make him silent, a gag was placed between his teeth.

While this was being done others of the robbers' band were attacking the express car.

The messenger was reinforced by an assistant when the train started, so that they could sleep watch in and watch out.

When the robbers rapped on the door of the car and demanded admittance, the messenger was on duty. He asked them what they wanted.

"Open up and we'll tell you," they replied.

"Not on your life. I won't do it. It's against orders."

"We'll break the door open if you don't."

"Go ahead and do it. I won't open up."

"All right—here goes. We're going to dynamite it."

"Dynamite and be d—d," answered the plucky messenger.

They placed a small fulminate cartridge under the jamb of the door, and a second later there was an explosion.

The door tore loose and dropped to the ground.

The robbers waited a moment.

"The first man that comes through that door dies," called the messenger.

"Oh, h—l, look here, don't be a fool! Let us get at the safe, and we'll not harm you."

"You can do as you please about the safe when you get it. As for me and my man here, we're going to see you don't get it."

Just then the engine was uncoupled and started down the track.

"You see we're uncoupling you, and there'll be no getting back to Omaha until you get an engine. You might as well give in and save your hide."

"Thank you, but I have another engagement," the express agent laughed.

"You think that you'll get rescued by the next train. You lose on that. The next is a freight, and we've flagged her."

"I don't care. If you want that safe you've got to fight for it."

"You poor devil—haven't you got sense enough to know when you can drive a good bargain?" The speaker had just come up.

He was a tall, dark man, with a long, drooping mustache.

His black, flashing eyes, and the carriage of his head, immediately proclaimed him the leader of this band of unruly men.

"I don't want to kill you, but if you don't give up——"

The only answer was a shot from the back of the car.

The bandits dropped on their faces, most of them under the car, and the messenger shot several times more.

There was no response from the robbers.

They did not return the fire of the imprisoned men—they had a better card than that.

"Hand me the dynamite!" demanded their chief, in a low tone.

He took a stick of the murderous stuff and adjusted a fuse to it.

"I'll give you one more chance to surrender," he called to the men.

Again they answered with shots, and one of the bandits sprang to his feet with a curse and then pitched forward, dead.

"That settles it, you cursed dogs!" cried the leader.

He struck a match, and then from where he was hidden he tossed the dynamite into the car.

There was a scuffling of feet inside, and a man jumped out to be caught at the edge of the forest. It was the assistant.

The messenger himself stuck to his post, and the next second there was an appalling report, and the roof of the end of the car blew off.

A moment later the men entered.

There was very little about which could, with any

degree of accuracy, be called a man, and they did not worry to find what remained.

If the truth were told, all that was human was one foot and the bone of the man's leg—the rest was scattered.

The bandit chief led the way to the safe.

In dead silence they lifted it down from its stand and carried it to the door.

"Let's open it in here," one of the men proposed.

"No, no, it isn't very light here," answered the chief. What he really meant was that he did not like to stay in the place in which the heroic messenger had met his terrible death.

They were expert safe crackers, and in a few moments it was opened.

"Hum, one hundred thousand," said the leader.

He carefully counted the packages of bills, and then passed them to one of his followers, who stood by with some stout leather saddlebags.

"Put the money in the bags and tie it on your saddle," he commanded; "we'll do the sharing later—when we get home," and he laughed in gloomy fashion.

"Well, boys, how about the men who were told off to take care of the cars? Are they through yet?"

"Yes, chief—here comes the last of them."

"Well, get all the boys together and we'll start. One of you shin up that pole and cut the wires. Then go a few hundred feet farther down and cut another bunch. The top wires are the ones."

His followers did as they were bid, and then gathered around him.

Of the band but one was missing and he lay dead, killed by the plucky messenger.

"Lift Tom up, boys. We can't leave him here."

They lifted the body and carried it to where the horses were and strapped it on one of them.

The men were mounting, when their chief suddenly looked along the train.

He saw several heads sticking out of the windows.

"Take a flock shot at those fools," he commanded.

Several of the men drew their revolvers and Winchesters and shot along the cars.

One bullet cut into a window where the head of the sorrowing father was, and he drew it in a good deal faster than a turtle does when he gets into his shell.

"That'll do, boys. Let's get out of this. Gallop."

In a second they were lost to view in the deep gloom of the forest.

The train crew were paralyzed for a time, and then began to see if there was no way of helping themselves.

They tried to tap the wires, and found that they were cut.

Then they realized that there was nothing to do but to go for assistance.

They sent a brakeman down the line, and he found the engine in a deep cut, stone cold, or nearly so.

The bandits had run it about five miles down the line and dumped the fire.

The fireman was lying under a mass of coal, and was almost suffocated.

It had slipped down on him during the run, and the outlaw engineer had not bothered to remove it.

The brakeman liberated him, and then between them they tried to get up fire.

Of course they had difficulty, as the fireman was so stiff from being bound so tightly that the cords cut his flesh.

After a time, however, the steam gauge began to show some head, and the wheels' great drivers responded feebly when the throttle was opened.

They were about to try to run back when, in the far distance, they heard the whistle of an approaching train.

The brakeman grabbed up a red lantern and started down the track.

The fireman blew the whistle in short blasts and tended the fire.

In a few minutes the wrecking train, for such it was, arrived.

The superintendent of the roads, a man named Brown, was on board and had with him a crowd of his best men.

He was amazed when he heard the story.

The great engine was backed up and coupled to the train.

Wilson was found still lying by the track where he had fallen when struck, and he was still unconscious.

His skull had been fractured, and he died before the train reached Omaha, despite the assistance of several doctors, who were on board.

The "Transcontinental Limited" reached its destination about four hours late.

There was the wildest excitement in that city when the story became known, and the citizens voted a purse of twenty-five thousand dollars, to which the express company added a like sum.

The railroad company said they would double what had been offered, and that made one hundred thousand for the man or men who would bring the murderers to justice.

Posses were formed, and several companies of deputies sworn in.

They realized that they were playing a desperate game, for the robbers were outlaws to whom human life did not count.

They were desperate men who were wanted in many States for murder and even worse crimes, and were under the leadership of a man whose cunning, courage and craftiness were second to none in the United States.

The band was to defy all attempts at capture, and to commit many more crimes before they were finally rounded up.

To capture them was the greatest desire of all men who had any spark of manhood in that part of the country, and the immense reward was a great inducement.

The railroad and express company, at last despairing of their case, sent to the Pinkerton Detective Agency, and William Pinkerton set his best men on the trail.

How they succeeded is a matter of history.

They were baffled at every turn, and, while several times they reached the outlaw camps while the embers of their fires still smoked, they were unable to catch up with them.

On one occasion, to show their contempt for the detectives, the bandits ambushed them and succeeded in killing three and wounding four, and not one of their own band was even scratched.

CHAPTER III.

NICK CARTER TAKES A HAND IN THE GAME.

Having finished his last great case, the greatest of living detectives had made up his mind to take a vacation.

With Chickering Carter, his able assistant, he had thought of taking a trip to Bermuda.

The winter was going to be a severe one, and Nick argued that from labor conditions it was to be a busy one for him.

The old adage of Satan finding mischief for idle hands is never truer than in winter, when there are many such hands out of work.

Nick was thinking of this one morning about ten days after the now famous "Transcontinental Limited" train robbery.

He had followed the case, and the more he thought of it the more he marveled at the genius of the man who was chief of the gang of outlaws.

No one seemed to know what his name was. He was called the chief by his men, and they ought to have known, if any one did.

It was a peculiar case, and the great reward made it a very attractive one; besides this, there was the great feather that it would be in the cap of any man who caught the chief and his men.

There were other things also.

The Pinkerton men were making a great to-do over their efforts, and were accomplishing nothing.

Nick was an old rival of Billy Pinkerton, and if he could win where the detective chief was losing——

But his day-dreams were broken into by a knock at the door.

"Who is it?" asked Nick.

"A telegram, sir—a telegram."

"All right, poke it in the slit in the door. The landlord will sign for it."

Carter watched the slim, yellow envelope slip in through the letter slot in a disinterested manner.

He was very comfortable where he sat, and his cigar tasted very good, and he thought, "I'll let it wait."

In a moment, however, he sat bolt upright as another idea struck him.

In a second he had the telegram and tore it open.

"By Heaven, just what I thought," he muttered.

Then he read it over again.

"Can you take the case of the 'Limited'? We are in despair of ever having the malefactors brought to justice. Wire at once.

"HAMILTON SMITH, Gen'l Man.,
"Union Pacific R. R., Omaha."

"Hum, rather strange that I should have just been thinking of this. Well, there goes my vacation. I suppose I can stand it.

"I must find Chick, he will be overjoyed. He's been crazy to get on that case. But first I must answer."

Nick called the landlord and sent off a telegram to the general manager.

He did not say much, there was no need to.

"Be with you in two days," was all the message said which brought a feeling of relief to the railroad man.

He had hoped to finish the case without having to ask the assistance of an Eastern detective, but had been forced into it.

Of course, he felt that Carter was the best in the land, and when the detective said he was coming it filled him with pleasure.

"Now, if ever, we will get those devils."

That very night there was another hold-up under almost the same circumstances on another road on the U. P. system.

There was no killing, owing to the fact that the trainmen realized that the bandits would stand no fooling.

But, while there was no murder done, the general manager felt as badly as though there had been.

The robbers only secured about fifty thousand, but that was more than enough.

Their methods were the same as before, and those who saw the chief gave a description which tallied with that of the man who held up the "Limited."

The hold-up gang seemed to number about what it had before.

There were at least twenty men, and they went about their work in the same manner as on the previous occasion.

The engine was taken down the line and put out of business, and the telegraph wires cut.

The result was that the gang had enough time to get away, as the wrecking train was the first to meet them.

Nick Carter found Chick soon after he decided to go, and told him of his acceptance of the case.

"So we're going to do that bunch up, are we?" asked the young fellow.

"Well, we're going to try."

"Try? Where have I heard that word before?"

"That's what I said."

"Yes, and that's what you always say when we have a good job under way, Nick."

"But this is a beauty, Chick. There are all those special deputies and Pinkerton men, and they've done nothing except get killed."

"That is why we are going to succeed."

"Good for you. I feel that way myself, and I am sure we will, but, before it's over, there will have been something doing."

"Well, Nick, you'd be disappointed if there was not."

The great detective smiled and answered:

"There are others."

"Perhaps so, but when do we start?"

"To-night from Jersey City."

"How do we go?"

"What do you mean? By what road?"

"No, I don't mean that. If we go as Nick Carter and his——"

"Oh, I had thought of that. We go as two cattle men from the West returning from seeing the sights in the East."

"Two cattle men?"

"Well, yes. But, perhaps, we might be a cattle man and an Eastern investor. How would that do?"

"I think that's better, Nick. You can be the cattle man and——"

"You the investor, eh?"

"Yes, that's the idea. You see, above all things, your disguise must not be penetrated, whereas if I am dis——"

"If you are discovered the whole game is given away just as much."

"But I won't be discovered."

"Ah! that's the way to talk."

"All right. I will meet you then at the Pennsylvania Railroad depot at six o'clock."

"Yes. So long till then."

The young detective took up his hat and left Nick to his thoughts, which were so interesting that we can well afford to follow them for a little while.

To his analytical mind the case of these train robberies presented several peculiar features.

Why was it that the band were so well able to defy their pursuers?

They must have a very well organized intelligence department; for half the countryside was up in arms against them, and still they managed to do as they pleased.

Then there was the gang itself.

It seemed to number about twenty, and each and every one was a desperate character.

Its mysterious leader, the "Chief," was another thing that excited his wonder. The man was a genius, and also a devil.

The mobility of the bandits was another remarkable thing.

They were here one day and fifty miles away the next.

Their horses must be the finest stock the country produces, and it was to be expected that this should be so.

Several times when they made raids on certain ranches all they had taken was food and the best horses on the place.

How they obtained sufficient food was another question.

Of course, they terrorized the inhabitants and made them give up, but even then they could not feed twenty men in this way without being caught, as the whole country knew of their depredations.

Then there was another thing. None of the men were known by name.

The old man on the "Continental Limited," who had recognized the murderer of the conductor as his son, refused to give his name, and had disappeared as soon as the train reached Omaha.

Taken all in all, the whole affair was a mystery of the most mysterious kind.

The more Carter thought of it the more his spirits rose.

Now he was really to have a case worth taking.

There would be danger, plenty of it, and success was, to say the best, almost to be doubted.

Nick and Chick took the six o'clock train as they had intended.

No one would have dreamed that the cattle man, with the sombrero and rough, rasping voice coming from a long, dark beard, was the great detective.

He was accompanied by another man, who would have passed anywhere for an Eastern gentleman from New York.

He was well dressed and wore a heavy mustache and a brown derby hat.

When they boarded the train and went to the dining car the Westerner attracted a little attention, owing to his uncouthness, but it soon passed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GENERAL MANAGER.

Hamilton Smith, General Manager of the Union Pacific, reached his office a day or two later in no very pleasant frame of mind.

The night before he had been awakened by a telegram.

It was only to say that a posse of men, in whom he had especial confidence, had been ambushed and almost all had been killed.

A train was bringing in the survivors that morning.

"Well, there's one thing those boys did do.

"That local had about ten thousand dollars on it, and they at least diverted the attention of the bandits from attempting to attack it, and the money got through.

"But it's a bad business, a bad business.

"I don't see how we can stop this gang of cut-

throats. The governor must ask for troops, and then, perhaps, we can do something.

"Of course, that Eastern detective may succeed, but I doubt it.

"He is the best in the country, and that is saying a good deal; besides which, Billy Pinkerton says he's a good one, and he knows."

Just then the call boy announced that there were two gentlemen who wanted to see the general manager.

"Who are they?"

"They say that they're to see you to-day, and that you sent for them."

"I sent for them? I don't remember any one whom I sent for!

"What are they like?"

"Aw! one's a farmer, and the other looks like an Eastern gent.

"He's the one who does all the talking in the combine."

"Well, show them in."

The general manager turned wearily to a mass of correspondence on his desk and began looking over some letters.

When the two men entered he did not look up.

"Take a seat, gentlemen," was all the greeting they received.

In a moment, however, he looked up.

To his astonished eyes the men appeared to be taking things very easy.

The general manager was a very big man in his little world, and those who came to see him usually behaved as though they thought he was a king, at least.

These two visitors, however, were smoking and had their feet cocked upon one of his favorite chairs.

"Well, you men take things easy," he exploded, indignantly.

"I've to! If we didn't some one else would," was the reply from the cattle man, in a very mild tone of voice as he brought his feet to the floor with a resounding thump.

"But you have your nerve to smoke in here without my permission."

"We have? Why, man, you'll smoke when you die without your own permission, and what difference does it make?"

"But I don't allow smoking——"

"You don't? Why have you got that lovely bunch of stogies in your desk, eh?" And the cattle man stepped to the desk and helped himself and offered one to his companion.

By this time the general manager looked as though he would go off from apoplexy.

"You scoundrel—you thief——" he began.

"Stop!"

"I will have you thrown out of my office——"

"That's all right, Mr. Smith! I guess you know us. Show him, Chick!"

Both the detectives reached to their faces, and, in less than a second, the general manager was confronted with the smiling faces of Nick Carter and his assistant.

He sank back in a chair as though stupefied.

"Why! why! I don't believe that——"

"You don't believe that we're who you think we are?"

"Yes, yes, but how did you get here? I did not know that you had arrived."

"No; we thought best to surprise you."

"But, why? I don't understand why."

"Well, because we have the unpleasant faculty of making ourselves disliked by a great many people, members of whom are at present in different prisons, and——"

"And you don't want to be known?"

"That's just it! If we are recognized our work is made doubly difficult. All the crooks are on their guard, and the other detectives, also, don't care to help us any too much."

"Well, you know best. Then I am not to let any one know that you have undertaken to do this little job?"

"No, sir; we are traveling strictly incog."

"This is your assistant, Chickering Carter, I presume?"

"Right you are, and we are going to work on this job together."

"Then I feel doubly assured of success."

The general manager was beginning to catch the infection of Nick's confidence.

Nick Carter had the gift of encouraging others to a remarkable degree.

His quiet manner and calm, resolute face always seemed to make him a man to be depended on, and whenever he said he would attempt to unravel some deep-laid plot or mystery, the mere tones of his voice made his hearers feel that the deed was as good as done, and that justice had been satisfied.

"But, Mr. Smith," began Nick, "I want to know something about these train robbers of yours."

"Fire away, and I'll try and answer your questions."

"In the first place, how is it that they seem to always possess exact information as to where their pursuers are?"

"I cannot tell you that, Mr. Carter. We have done all in our power to find out how it is, but have come to the conclusion that it was hopeless; there must be a leak somewhere."

"Of course, there must. Do you suspect any of your employees?"

"No, I don't. All of our men are to be trusted to any length."

"They are always the sort that stand watching the least; it is nearly always the 'trusted employee' who steals the funds of the concern and ruins it."

"Yes, I have heard that, Mr. Carter; but, really, I would answer with my life for the probity of any of the men in this office."

"All right, sir, we shall see. Where are the raids on this band planned?"

"They have all been planned here in my office. It makes me ill to think of the men I have sent to death from this room."

"You cannot help that, Mr. Smith. You meant well, but you are up against one of the smartest crooks in the country."

"Yes, he's a devil for cunning."

"Which brings me to another question. Have you any idea who he is, and where he came from?"

"No, we have not."

"What does he look like?"

"He is a tall, dark man, with a drooping black mustache, and wears the proverbial clothes of the bandit—leg boots and a black slouch hat."

"A black sombrero, eh?"

"Yes, that's what he wore when he was seen last, and his followers wear the same."

"Hum, that is usually the sign that the wearer of such a bonnet comes from the Panhandle, or somewhere else in the Southwest."

"Yes, that's a fact; and some of the men who have seen him say that he speaks as though he came from Texas."

"Well, if he does, we have to deal with a man who can and, what's worse, will shoot, and when he does it is to kill."

"Yes, worse luck; they all shoot to kill."

"What's their record so far?"

"To the best of my knowledge they have killed about thirty-two men and wounded, God knows, how many."

"When did all these killings happen?"

"They killed the first two on the 'Continental Limited,' and since then it has been the posses that have suffered."

"Do you know, Mr. Smith, there is something peculiar about this whole affair; I cannot see how they get such exact information about the parties who are out looking for them."

"Nor can I."

"Now where does this lovely bunch hang out?"

"You noticed the broad belt of woods which you passed through for the last fifty miles before entering this city?"

"Yes, I took especial notice of them, and they looked deep, dark and gloomy enough for any one."

"Well, that is where they hide; or, I should say, range, for the woods are two hundred miles long, about, and from fifty to a hundred wide, and they lurk in the whole length and breadth of them."

"That's a pretty big playground, isn't it, Chick?"

"You bet it is! But I should think that they could be caught there.

"Why don't you surround them and drive them to the center and then capture them?"

"That's a good idea, Mr. Chick, but we cannot get enough men to do it; the devils would mount and break through and kill every one in sight."

"Of course, they would, and you cannot blame men for not wanting to be plugged," said Nick.

"Well, Mr. Carter, how do you intend to catch these men?"

"I have not made up my mind yet."

"How can I assist you?"

"You cannot do much except this: When I want men I must have them, and I want a credential which will place the command of all these parties in my hands if I desire it."

"That's easily done, as I am nominally the head of the men now."

The general manager wrote a short note and signed it, saying that the bearer was his representative, and all orders issued by him were to be obeyed.

"That's about all I think I can do for you, Mr. Carter."

"All right, sir, we will say good-morning, and when you hear from us again——"

"It will be over?"

"Yes, over one way or the other. We will have our men or they will have us, and there will be need of other detectives."

"In other words, Mr. Carter, you will succeed or will lose your life in the attempt."

The great detective bowed assent and the general manager got on his feet, and, with tears in his eyes, shook hands with both of them.

"You are brave men; yes, brave men, and I hope, from the bottom of my heart, that you will succeed."

"We'll do our best, eh, Chick?"

"Yes, sir; you can count on us to the end and a little further," added the young detective, smiling.

So saying, the detectives left the room, and, as they closed the door behind them, the general manager sighed. He hated to see brave men leave his office on that errand; so few of them came back.

Shaking his head, he turned to his work, and by the time he was settled the detectives were lost in the crowds which thronged the busy city.

CHAPTER V.

THE CAMP IN THE FOREST.

The fire was burning brightly under a huge kettle over which stood a man with a ladle.

Every now and then he would stir the mess in the pot and throw some more wood on the fire.

The flickering light served only to make the darkness, now growing more intense every minute, more and more dense.

It hung over the fire and tents, which could be seen near by, like a pall, and now and then hearing a branch break in the forest the cook would reach quickly back to his pistol and stand straining his ears.

Then, finding nothing came from the noise, he would go on with his preparations.

Beyond the cracking of the fire and his bustling about, the silence seemed almost to crush one.

It was only broken at rare intervals by the low groan of pain from the nearest tent.

At last a weak voice called the cook.

"Ain't they come back yet?"

"No; they ought to be here in a little while, though," he answered.

"Well, I wish they'd come. I feel orful bad, and I want to see the chief before I cash in."

"Aw, what are you talking about cashin' in for? You must be crazy!"

The only answer the wounded man gave was a low groan.

He had been hurt in the last skirmish with the sheriff's posse and hurt to death.

That was the day before when the bandits, for this was their camp, had ambushed a pursuing party and had killed several.

Of their number this was the only one who had been hurt, and his wound, a bullet through the right breast, was mortal.

"Give me a drink, will you, cook?"

The cook took a dipper of water to him and held it to his lips and saw that the man was really dying, and was going fast.

"When did they say they'd be back?" he asked, peevishly.

"'Bout sundown."

"It's that now, it's awful dark, and I want to see the chief; I want to see the chief," wailed the man.

"That's all right, Joe! he'll be back soon. Why, there they are now."

There were three shrill whistles in the far distance of the forest, which the cook answered in like manner.

Joe pursed his lips up to reply from force of habit, but he was too weak to make a sound.

A moment later there was the sound of breaking boughs and the tramp, tramp of horses' hoofs.

The cook stood by his fire, and, as he saw the men in the dim darkness come in, he placed the large frying pans over the embers.

As he did so, there stepped into the ring of firelight he who was the chief of these desperate men.

He was the same tall, dark man whom we have spoken of before, and now when he removed his mask it could be seen that he was very handsome. His forehead was high and well shaped, and his nose was finely chiseled. The only feature of his face that showed the outlaw chief was his eyes.

These were dark and keen, and were set too near together.

His mouth was well shaped, but the lips were too thin, denoting a man of inflexible will and showing cruelty.

His air, and the manner in which he held his head, showed that he was the chief, and that it would be well to obey his smallest wish.

"How's Joe, cook?" was his first question.

"Pretty bad, chief; he thinks he's going out, sir, and——"

"Going out; he's out of his head. That's all that's the matter with him."

"No, he ain't, sir; he seems quite sure, but he wants to see you very bad, and he's been asking about you a'l day."

"All right; I'll go to him."

He turned to go, but in a moment was back at the fire.

"Any mail to-day, cook?"

"Yes, sir, three notes, and they're on your tent."

"All right, I'll get them."

He started for his tent, but, as he passed the door of the sick man's tent, he heard the poor fellow call: "Is that you! Is that you, chief?"

"Yes; what do you want, Joe?"

"I want to see you a moment, sir; will you come in?"

The voice was very weak, and the chief recognized the fact that the man had little time to live.

"Well, what is it?"

"I want you to promise me that if ever you get clear of this business, I mean when you do get clear, will you see that my old woman, back in Missouri, gets my part of the divvy?"

"You can see to that yourself; we'll all go together when it's over."

"No, sir, I won't see to-morrow's sun; I am going out about sun up, and I want you——"

"Oh, nonsense; you are only dreaming."

"I am't, and I know it; I'm going out to-night. This wound is too much for mortal man, and——"

"Oh, Joe, I am sorry for you; I brought you to this," and his chief sank down by his side on the rude pallet of pine boughs.

A change had come over the hard, cruel face of his chief, and the man in the feeble light of the candle noticed it.

The hard lines had melted away, and the cruel lips were softened.

"Of course, I'll see your old woman gets your share."

"And you'll not let her know; there's a kiddie, and I wouldn't want him to know his father was a——"

"A train robber, eh?"

"That's what I mean, sir."

"All right; the kid will never know, and I'll get her the money."

"All right, chief," and the man turned on his pallet with a groan.

"Well, Joe, I've got to go out and see what's doing; I'll come back later and see how you're coming on."

"Would you mind shaking hands with me before you go, sir?"

"Of course not, old man," and the chief stretched out his hand and took the already cold one of his follower.

He shook it warmly, and then, lifting the flap of the tent, went out.

Outside the men were unsaddling and feeling their way.

The cook was putting supper on the table, or rather the ground, where they ate, and when the chief joined the group the contrast with the deathly quiet of the dying man's tent struck him very forcibly.

Seeing that supper would be ready in a few moments, he went to the spring and washed his hands.

A few minutes later the grub was ready, and they sat down to eat.

The chief sat a little apart from the rest with his lieutenant, who was his exact opposite in personal appearance.

He was short and thick-set, and had light, blond hair and looked like a German. He was much younger, being little more than a boy.

His steely blue eyes showed the quality of his grit, and his position in that band of cutthroats further attested to it.

His chief put the greatest faith in him, and he had the reputation of being the wickedest of the lot.

The meal was finished in the silence to which these men were accustomed, and, after it was over, the chief went to his tent.

He came out a moment later with three notes in his hands and went to the firelight.

As he opened the first he thought of the dying man.

"Cook, see if you can do anything for Joe, will you?"

The cook dropped his dishes and went to the tent, returned in a moment and said, quietly: "He's dead, sir."

"Dead?"

"Yes, sir—shall I tell the boys?"

"Yes, tell them, and tell about four of them to come to me."

The cook did as he was told, and four shadowy figures came to the fire.

"Joe is dead, men; I want you four to take him out and bury him."

"Where shall we put him?"

"In the old place—he'll have company there."

The chief was right; in that place, which was a little mound a short way from the camp, there were three others buried.

One of them was the chief's own brother, who had been wounded to death in a skirmish a week before.

Until his death the bandits had not been so murderous, but when the boy was put away they seemed to glory in taking life, and on several occasions had gone out of their way to kill.

The burial detail took the body up, and a short while after returned.

They reported to their chief, and he answered with a grunt.

"A lot he cares when one of us get it in the neck," one of them muttered when they withdrew.

"Oh, I think he cares, but he won't show it."

"I don't think he does. He only thinks that he has one less man."

"Perhaps so; but he never puts any of us into a hole he won't go in himself."

"No, he's always game; I'll say that for him."

The men joined their fellows, who were playing cards with the help of a small lantern.

The chief started reading his notes.

The first one he opened made him laugh.

"So they think we are at Fisher's landing place, eh? And they are taking fifty men there.

"A lot of good that'll do them; I've a good mind to give them a little reception. There are a good many of them, though."

He then took up the next note.

"Another bunch going to the Big Spring; well, they are a lot of chumps."

The third note, however, made him sit up.

"Whew, they've got that d—n detective after me now.

"At last I am up against trouble; he had me once, and if he ever gets me again—— But, before he does, there will be something doing.

"God, how I'd like to kill that devil," and his eyes glittered, and the long talon-like fingers clutched the papers and almost crushed them into pulp.

"Curse him! curse him!" He was becoming en-

raged now. "Oh, for one chance at that Nick Carter—I'd make him think that the old Nick had him."

He then lighted his pipe and commenced thinking with this object as the goal of his desires.

The letters he had read were from his spies.

The spies were at that time serving in the sheriff's posses, and were doing their best to lead their commands astray and at the same time keep their real chief supplied with information.

Owing to their having an intimate knowledge of the country, they were made the scouts of their different bands, and, on several occasions, had earned the praise of their chiefs for eluding supposed ambushes.

Thinking of this idea of having scouts with each band of the pursuers and of what utility they might be in accomplishing the ruin of Nick Carter, the chief hit on an idea.

He would warn these men to keep a lookout for the master detective, and when his chance came would ambush him.

Having decided this, he went to his rustic couch and slept the fitful slumber that is the lot of the hunted.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

The next morning the men were told by the lieutenant that there was no need of their moving that day, as none of the parties were on their trail.

There was satisfaction expressed by all of them, and the horses were picketed where they could most easily rest.

A little later, however, the cook announced the fact that all the fresh meat had given out and that there would have to be some more provided or they would have to eat "salt horse."

There was a great deal of dissatisfaction at this, and several of them said that they had discovered a deer lick and could get some venison if they were allowed.

The chief was asked about it, and he said that they could go, and, while they were out, do a little scouting.

The men took their Winchesters and revolvers and left on foot.

They intended to kill the deer, and, later in the afternoon, one of those left in camp would come out with a pack horse and bring in the meat.

As they left, two men came riding up very quietly

They dismounted and walked into the camp and asked for the chief.

The men in the camp recognized them and joshed them.

They were two of the scouts who were serving in the pursuing parties, and they had come to make their daily report to the chief.

There were five large parties scouting for him now, and these were men whom he had sent to join the two latest formed.

One of them was the man who had brought the information of Nick Carter's arrival, and the chief was questioning him about it.

"How did you find out that he had come?" was his first question.

"Why, he was in Smith's office."

"Of course he'd report to him, but I thought he'd have sense enough to come disguised."

"He was disguised. He and that kid, Chick he calls him, came to the office looking like an Eastern dude and a cattle man."

"How'd they get found out?"

"Why, little Jimmy was in the telephone box that he fixed so as to hear through the partition what was going on in the general manager's private office, you know, and he heard Carter tell who he was."

"Bully for him. But where have the detectives gone now?"

"That's what we don't know."

"Don't know! What the devil do you mean by that?"

"Well, we lost track of them after they left the office and——"

"What in h—l do I pay you galoots for? You are a pretty lot."

The bandit chief was getting very angry.

He was very much disturbed at the idea that Nick and his assistant were wandering about without being watched.

The truth was that he was very much afraid of the detectives, and would do anything to get them where they were dependent on his mercy.

The idea that they were, so to speak, at large was very disquieting, and he swore at the man roundly for not knowing all about them.

"Didn't Jimmy hear what Carter intended to do?"

"No. He did not say anything except——" and the man hesitated.

"Except what?"

"Except that he'd catch you and your band of cutthroats or get killed in the attempt."

"He said that, did he?"

"Yes, sir, he did, and the general manager stood up and shook hands with him on the strength of it."

"They're a nice lot, they are."

"And we want to know what you want us to do?"

"Do? There's nothing to do but to watch for those Carters and let me know about the movements of the different posses; that's about all."

"All right, sir, we'll do that and report by note, or ride in when we can slip off."

"All right, Jose! but for God's sake keep your eyes open for Carter, and you do the same, also," turning to the other man.

"All right, sir," and they lifted the flap of the tent and went out.

After they had gone the chief walked to and fro in his tent, and any one could have seen that he was in a state of great agitation.

His brow was creased with thought, and his mouth twitched; his hands, which were the most expressive part of his make-up, closed and opened with fierceness.

In all his career of murder and crime he had never felt what it was to fear a man.

But this was the exception.

Nick Carter, the inexorable; the man who had never met his man yet and who had pledged his word that he would make his capture or lose his life; the thought was terrifying.

A vision of the dread electric chair came before his eyes, and he waved his hands as though he would brush it away.

He was thinking of this when the sound of far distant shots brought him to a standstill, listening with straining ears.

There was quite a fusillade, and then silence.

"That's surely not deer shooting. Here, men, get your guns."

Instantly there was a bustle and hurry among the tents, and then a grim silence.

The men were standing listening with their Winchesters cocked and ready.

Then came the sound of breaking branches and men's voices.

All the men in the camp selected trees with incredible swiftness, and hid behind them, waiting.

The next second there rang out the familiar three-whistle signal, and the hunting party came into the clearing.

In their midst was a stranger, who seemed to be wounded.

His right arm was in a sling, and the red stains of the blood were visible.

"Well, men, what's this? what's this?" demanded their chief.

"This feller was running away from one of the posses when we saw him and we rescued him."

"He says he's wanted down at Fort Leavenworth," answered another of the men, "and was trying to get to us to join when he was seen by that bunch.

"Then he tried to run, and they saw him and commenced shooting, and——"

"Here I am, sir," answered the prisoner, in a voice which could be easily recognized by his intimates as that of Chickering Carter, "and what are you going to do with me?"

"Do with you? I believe you're a bloody spy, that's what I think you are."

"A spy! How could I be a spy? That man there told you the truth. I made my get away from the Fort Leavenworth two weeks ago, and I——"

"Got away from the prison? I don't believe a word of it. Search him, men. Search him!"

The chief was instantly obeyed.

In Chick's pockets were only found a little change, a pocketknife, a dagger and a revolver.

"Pretty well supplied with irons, ain't he?" said one of the men.

"Yes, he needs them in his business. Well, boys, we had better give him what we give all spies."

There was a silence; the men did not think the young fellow was one of that class.

"I don't think he's a spy, sir," ventured one of them; "he was shot at by that posse and was wounded in the arm there."

"That proves nothing. He's a spy, I tell you, and the sooner you get it over the better."

The men looked at one another. They had rescued the man from a larger party, and he was their captive; besides, none of them wanted to shoot the fellow in cold blood.

"Here, you men—all of you! Come here and draw lots and see who are to kill this d—n spy."

The men came out from the tents and gathered round.

Some one produced a pack of cards and they all cut.

The five lowest were the ones selected, and they got their Winchesters ready.

The prisoner was backed against a tree and tied there.

"Do you want your eyes bandaged?" asked the chief.

"No, I don't. I am not afraid to die," answered Chick, feeling that his last moment was come.

The men took their station, and the young detective took one last look at the sky and earth and faced the pitiless muzzles of the rifles. The chief, as cold and cruel as death, stood by and gave the word.

"Are you ready to die?" he asked Chick. "Have you no old woman's prayers to make?"

The boy looked him in the eyes.

"I am not afraid to die, I told you, you cursed coward."

"All right; you'll die quick enough."

Chick felt that it would be a relief when it was over.

He was only sorry to die, on two accounts.

One was that he had to leave Nick, the only person in the world he cared for, and the other was that he was not to help to bring the bandits to justice.

His death would be amply revenged when Nick heard of it.

But his reverie was rudely broken into.

"Are you ready?"

This was spoken to the men and they answered that they were.

"All right—ready—aim——" Chick waited for the last word, which meant death, with eyes unflinching and head erect.

There was a pause. "Recover!" ordered the chief, and the glittering muzzles dropped.

The chief stepped forward, drew his bowie knife and cut the ropes which held Chick to the tree.

"You are too good a man to die like that," he said, his thin lips curling in an evil smile.

Chick tried to look just as cool as he had been all along when the very unexpected happened, but he could hardly repress a smile.

He thought it was all over with him, and the reaction in having his life given back to him was very great.

He started to thank the chief for having stopped before the fatal word "Fire."

"Never mind that. I was only trying you to see if you had the right sort of nerve. Now you can join us if the rest of the men will allow you and have no objection."

Appealed to in this way, the men who had gathered about all responded:

"No, no, we want him!" "He's a rare plucky one!" "He's our sort," were some of the expressions they used.

"All right, from now on you will share the risk and plunder with the rest," said the chief, addressing Chick.

"I cannot tell you how much I thank you, and——"

"Never mind that. It's a fair bargain, and if anything I am the gainer," answered the bandit, as he turned and walked to his tent.

He did not really think that Chick was a spy, but if he had shown the least lack of nerve when those Winchesters were waiting to let daylight into him, he would have been killed.

Had his real identity been guessed he would have had a shorter shift than he had just escaped.

CHAPTER VII.

PLANNING THE CAMPAIGN.

When Nick and Chick Carter left the office of the general manager they were both at sea as to the best method of catching the train robbers.

The difficulty of the case was the fact that the outlaws knew of every move against them before it occurred.

"If we could only get some information about them which would give us a chance to make a raid," said Chick.

"Yes, I was thinking of that myself," answered Nick.

"These fellows seem to have the business down pat; they hear when the sheriff is going to make a move against them, and all they have to do is to move camp."

"Yes, and sometimes when the wasp retreats it leaves a sting in its tail and the posse is ambushed."

"It is an infernal shame; these men must have a good following through the country or they could not get away."

"Yes, they have a great many advantages. There is one great reason why we have no chance against them."

"What's that?"

"The posses number about two hundred and fifty men now, and that's about two hundred too many."

"I don't see that that is a great disadvantage."

"You don't? Well, I'll tell you. When you have so many men you can never be sure that there is not a traitor somewhere."

"I see—there's so many that they don't all know one another, and the result is that there are leaks."

"That's right, Chick; that's what I mean."

The detectives were approaching their hotel now.

Behind them there lurked a figure who was shadowing them.

Nick saw that it was so, but he did not betray himself, only saying to Chick that there was a man on their trail already.

When they came to an alley they both dodged into it and immediately ran into the back door of a large dry goods house.

A few seconds later they emerged from the front door and fairly flew across the street and into the next alley.

When they emerged from that one the hair on both their faces was changed, and the larger of the two had changed his coat.

He had not really changed it, but it was one of Nick's patent reversible garments, and he had just turned it inside out.

They then went on their way back to their hotel, to the best of Nick's judgment, unobserved.

As they went along they continued their conversation, which consisted of the many reasons which caused the failure of all the expeditions sent against the outlaws.

After going to their rooms, the two detectives got together for a council.

The way to meet these men must be found, and they intended to do it.

"I can't see any way of getting onto them," said Chick.

"I do, and though it is not a very good one, we will have to try it."

"What is it, Nick?"

"We both understand that large parties are of no use in this business, and the only way which looks at all good to me is to do a little work ourselves, unassisted."

"You mean we are to get into those woods by ourselves and find the outlaws?"

"That's just what I do mean. We will find them, and then bring a bunch of Billy Pinkerton's fly cops and gather them in."

"That sounds like a good scheme."

"Yes, I think it is as good as we can get."

"All right, when do we start for the woods?"

"I think to-night would be a good time; we could get into the forest under cover of darkness, and by morning do some real work."

"All right; but where do I see you after we get into the woods?"

"I don't know. You had better make a date with me to be at a certain place which we will decide on later."

"All right."

"Now we'd better get into our woodsman clothing, so as to look like the rest of the bandits."

That night, about dusk, two figures with large slouch hats, and revolvers prominently displayed, slipped into the woods a few miles down the railroad tracks.

They saw no one and were seen by no one.

That night was spent in a lumberman's deserted shanty.

In the morning, after a caution to be careful and not get caught, the detectives parted.

They were to meet at the shanty that night and, if not then, the next night; but if they had not met by the third night the one who arrived at the place safely would know that the other had met disaster.

With this understanding they parted.

Each took with him enough food to last several days, and plenty of ammunition.

Chick went direct into the deepest part of the forest.

He was not much of a woodsman, but he reasoned that by following his compass he could retrace his steps as far as the railroad tracks and from there reach the shanty.

He had walked briskly for about three hours when he found hoofprints; these were something, and he decided to follow them.

He went along quietly, as he found the tracks were quite fresh, expecting to run onto some one at every turn in the trail.

He had walked about a mile when he was sure he heard men's voices.

Hidden behind a tree, he waited.

Along came a number of mounted men. Their horses made no noise, as the grass and leaves were so thick that the sound was deadened.

As he looked there were more voices in his rear.

"This is a pretty populous neighborhood," he thought.

At that moment the men in his rear came in sight.

They were on foot and looked like tough ones.

They had Winchesters and revolvers, and wore black slouch hats.

As soon as he sized them up he realized that they must be a crowd of the outlaws, and he turned to see where the mounted men had gone.

To his dismay he saw that they had stopped, and, as he looked, one of them threw his gun to his shoulder and sent a bullet whizzing by his ear.

Chick dodged back to shelter, and, as he did so, a regular volley came from the same source.

He realized that he was up against it.

He did not want to run to the outlaws for protection, and yet the others were trying to kill him.

There was nothing left to do.

The outlaws were watching the performance from the trees behind which they had hidden, and Chick started for them.

As he swung clear from the tree he felt the bite of a bullet on his right arm, and the revolver he held in it dropped.

He stopped and picked it up, and then ran on.

The horsemen yelled and charged after him.

A second later the men behind the trees began to get busy, and three saddles were emptied in no time.

There was a decided check in the rush, and then the men tumbled from their saddles and took to the trees and commenced shooting from behind them.

The outlaws, realizing that they would soon be beaten at that game, because the others outnumbered them, withdrew.

The rest of Chick's story we know very well.

The only thing that bothered Chick, when he was enrolled as a member of that notorious gang of cutthroats, was the fact that he might have a great deal of trouble in communicating with Nick.

As a new man he would not be intrusted with any work which would allow him a chance to revisit the shanty, and this began to worry him.

There was one thing, however: Nick would sooner or later come on some trail, which would lead him to the camp, and then they could see one another in some way and make arrangements for the final act of the drama.

Strange as it may seem, Chick's guess was not far off.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER ON THE TRAIL.

After making the date with Chick, Nick went along the track for a way looking for a trail which he was sure there must be.

He walked about a mile and a half, and saw the small bough of a tree bent in a manner which was not natural.

Nick left the track and examined it.

It had been broken by a human agency, and after carefully looking about he saw another.

This was about fifty yards away.

He went to it and soon discovered another.

Then he realized that he was on the trail of some one who had recently come out of the woods.

He knew it was out, because the twigs were broken the other way.

Carefully noting the way the other man had come, Nick followed back on his trail.

He had not gone very far when he saw fresh horse signs, and it looked as though there had been quite a band of horsemen.

He hesitated for a time as to which to follow, but decided to keep on the one-man trail.

Carefully threading his way, the great detective was thinking hard what should he do if he were suddenly to come on the camp of the bandits.

As he was meditating how he would avoid capture, the sound of distant firing came clearly to his ears.

He stopped and listened, and then started on the dead run to where it was going on.

He had only gone a few hundred yards when the noise ceased, and he was puzzled to know how to proceed.

Still trusting to guess, he went on; not so fast as before, however.

About half a mile was traversed when he heard horses and men's voices very low.

They seemed to be coming his way.

He crouched behind a great old oak tree and waited.

In a few seconds the funeral procession came in sight.

It was the remains of the posse which had fired on Chick.

They were a sorry-looking lot.

Three dead men strapped to their saddles and twice as many wounded ones.

Those who had escaped unhurt were riding along with their faces long and gloomy.

Carter looked at them and soon saw that they were a sheriff's posse and not a crowd of the desperadoes.

He was about to reveal himself when he realized that it would do no good, and he lay hid.

The melancholy party went along, and as they went by he heard one of the men say: "Another of those d—n ambushes."

"So I thought," said Carter to himself; "there go the ambushed ones. I wonder where those devils are who did the act?"

He decided not to follow the dead party, especially as they had horses. And so he started along the old trail and found that it ran parallel to the one the horsemen had come.

"The camp must be at the end of this," he began to think.

He kept on and on, however, always feeling that at the end he would find the camp.

A little after noon he began to smell smoke in the air and realized that he was approaching a fire.

A fire meant human agencies at work, and that meant that he must be approaching a camp or settlement.

Carter proceeded with the greatest caution, and soon he saw the figures of men standing by tents dimly outlined in the distance.

"The outlaw camp," he muttered to himself.

Gliding from tree to tree he got closer and closer until he could distinguish the features of the men sitting outside of the tents.

To his utter amazement, he saw Chick smoking contentedly by one of the fires.

"Poor chap; they must have taken him prisoner."

Just then Chick got to his feet and sauntered out to where the horses were picketed.

"That don't look very much like a prisoner," thought the master detective, "though he is wounded."

Chick in the meantime was examining the horses. There were two of which he might pick, and then two remounts which had belonged to some of the men who had been killed.

Nick Carter worked his way around to that side of the camp and got as near as he could to the horses.

Then he whistled in the lowest tone imaginable a very short snatch of melody which always meant that he was near by.

He could see Chick start, but the young fellow went on with the air of the thing as though he had been whistling it all the time.

A minute later he returned to camp.

He had just settled himself comfortably in front of the fire, when, with a snort, the horse he had been examining broke loose from his picket and started into the woods.

"Say, young feller, that's your horse," called the cook, and Chick rose to chase him in.

Several of the men volunteered to help him, but he declined, saying that despite his lame arm he wasn't a cripple yet.

A minute or two later he was in the forest.

As the horse went by Nick he had thrown a piece of wood at him, and the brute ran away, making it quite a trip to go and get him.

Chick made good time, but when he got near the horse he urged him to run farther; the result was that he was about half a mile away before he caught him.

Nick came up at the moment Chick secured his mount.

They were very glad to see one another, and Chick almost hugged his chief when he got to him.

"How did you become a bandit?" was Nick's first question.

Chick answered him, and told the whole story.

Nick was amazed at their good luck.

"Why, I couldn't have planned it better; that's the best luck ever."

"I thought I was going to get a few hot shots for a time, however."

"Yes, that was a pretty close shave."

"And now I am a bandit; you see I don't feel like being caught here by any of the parties who are out, because I'd have to fire on them or be killed by these devils here."

"That's all right. Make a bluff!"

"Yes, but suppose that the sheriff's men make good; then I am in as bad a hole as ever."

"Well, you are in a peculiar fix; but there is not much danger of either of these things happening, is there?"

"I don't think so."

"What are the gang doing now?"

"They are all in camp except for the scouts who are with the different parties."

"Is there no ambush to take place to-day, or anything of that kind?"

"There seems to be something in the air; the chief and three of the worst of the bunch are in his tent talking."

"Haven't you any idea what about?"

"I went by once and tried to hear, and I heard the voice of the head devil say: 'The six-forty express out of Omaha,' but that was all I could catch."

"The six-forty express, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's the train which carries the gold shipments from California to the East. Why, they'd never attack that—it is too well guarded."

"That's what he said."

"Well, look here, Chick; I want to keep posted on the movements of the band."

"I know that and I'll do my best."

"Yes, I know that. What I want you to do is to get to the shanty whenever you can, and if I am not there leave me a note."

"All right, I will; but I must go back to camp."

"Yes, they will think it has taken the devil of a time to catch that cayuse; good-by, my boy, and be careful."

"Good-by, Nick; I certainly will."

Chick mounted his horse and rode away toward the camp and Nick started back to the shanty.

He had gone only a few hundred yards, when he heard the soft pad, pad of a horse's hoofs coming through the woods.

Carter hid himself and watched.

A man came by dressed like all the rest of the outlaws and heavily armed.

When he had gone by, Carter decided to follow him and see where he came in the game that was being played.

The horse was slowed down, and a few hundred feet from the outlaw camp the man stopped, and the three shrill whistles broke the stillness.

A second later they were answered, and he rode into the camp and was received like a long-lost brother.

Nick Carter felt that he had seen the man somewhere before, and racked his brains to remember.

Suddenly the place he had seen him came to him. The man was a sheriff's deputy, and Carter had last seen him riding with his posse.

"Hum! that's a nice state of affairs! Now I know where our friend the chief gets his exclusive information," Carter muttered.

He waited a little while, and then the man came out of the chief's tent, mounted his horse and rode hurriedly away.

Seeing there was nothing more to be gained by spying, Carter went back to the shanty.

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE SHANTY.

When he arrived at the shanty he decided that he would map a plan of action, and that before the end of the week there would be the final round-up and the desperadoes would only be a memory.

He was to wait until Chick brought him information of the next move of the bandits, and then he would strike.

There was nothing to do but wait, and he settled himself on his blanket and began to read.

But before long the desire for sleep became overpowering, and he felt that he might as well give in to it.

"I may not have much time to sleep in the future, and I might as well get all I can now," was what he thought, and he promptly went to sleep. This was a few hours before sunset, and the great detective slept without being disturbed until well after nine o'clock.

When he awoke it was with a start.

Some one was fumbling with the door of the schack. In a moment it was flung open, and Carter saw the bearded face of one of the outlaws whom he had seen at the fireside in the camp. Carter had his revolver ready and covered the man.

"Halt, who is that?" he demanded.

The man stopped in his tracks, too amazed to speak at first.

"It is me, Bill—Bill Gurney," he answered.

"What do you want in here?"

"Why, pardner, I usually sleep here when I'm on duty: who be you, anyway, to be asking me questions?"

"None of your business who I am. Turn that face of yours where the moon can shine on it—I want to see you."

The man dropped his hand down to his gun.

"None of that. Keep your hands off those guns," Carter warned; "if you don't it's you for the crows; I've got you covered now."

Bill Gurney looked into the dark recesses of the hut, but could see nothing.

"Get into the moonlight and hurry about it."

The voice of the detective had a compelling ring about it, and the man jumped and did as he was told.

"So, I thought I knew you; you're my old friend, Red Bill, from Butte, eh?"

The man's face paled in the moonlight, and he fairly gasped.

"I, why I ain't Red."

"Aw! cut that out! You can't lie to me; don't you remember the little counterfeiting game in Detroit that you got sent up for, and perhaps you remember the man who sent you up?"

"Oh, God! I didn't expect that I'd meet you here, Mr. Carter."

He had recognized Nick's voice now, and was crawling abjectly.

"Of course you didn't; of course not. What did you think I'd be doing when a game like this was on?"

The man was playing for time; he hoped to get Carter talking and then make a break for the forest, and so get away and warn the bandits.

Carter saw through his little game, and just when he was edging toward the door called him down.

"Stop right where you are; stop, I tell you," he warned.

The man was at the door now, and he resolved to take a desperate chance.

If he could get back to his chief and warn him of Carter's proximity, and the gang could get together and capture him, all danger of ever being caught would be gone, and his own personal revenge would be satisfied.

"All right, sir; I'll stop," he said, and he did so.

"That's a good little boy to do as you are told."

"Good nothing."

"No, I know all about you; you are one of those bold, bad men who hold up trains."

"Aw, quit your joshing, I ain't ever done nothing to you."

His chance had come.

As he finished speaking he bolted through the door.

In a second Carter was outside himself, and as the figure of Red Bill flitted through the trees he took a shot at it.

The man threw up his hands and fell without a word.

Carter ran to him and found that the bullet had gone clean through his head.

"I hated to do it, Bill," he muttered; "but if I hadn't my life would not have been worth shucks."

He turned the bandit over and searched him.

There was a plug of tobacco, a long knife, a revolver, and nothing else in sight.

Carter had an idea that he might have some papers on him which would prove valuable, and he was surprised not to find any.

However, he took off his boots and searched them.

His guess was a good one.

In the side of the right boot there was a slit, and in it quite a wad of thin paper covered with oil silk.

The moonlight was not very strong, and Carter could not see what they were about.

He placed the packet in an inside pocket and returned to the shanty.

He was sorry that he had been forced to shed human blood, but there had been no other way out of it.

Bill Gurney was a very bad man, and if he had gotten away Carter would have been caught. He knew he could not travel as fast as the horses of the outlaws, and that they would reach the edge of the woods before him, thus making his capture sure.

In their hands he knew how short his shrift would be; most of them were men who owed him a grudge which could only be wiped out with his heart's blood.

He was thinking of this as he entered the hut.

He had just stepped into the darkness of the interior when something struck him on the head with terrible force.

Nick Carter dropped as though shot and lay still as death.

Had the wig he was wearing not had a sole leather crown under the hair, that would have been the last of the great detective.

His assailant stooped over him and muttered: "I don't know who he is, but I certainly got him good."

And he had, for Carter was insensible.

A thin stream of blood appeared on his forehead, and the outlaw bent down and removed his hat.

To his intense surprise, the hair came with it, revealing the close-cropped hair of the detective, which was already beginning to be clotted with blood.

"Whew! I wonder who this fancy guy is?" muttered the man.

He began to try Carter's beard, and found that, too, was false.

"Nick Carter, by all that's holy!" he exclaimed, starting back.

He stood for a moment amazed, and then, carefully feeling the detective's heart, he ran outside and returned with a bridle.

With great speed he tied Carter's arms and legs so that when the detective awoke he would find himself helpless.

Then the man stood back and gloated over his captive.

"Carter, by Heaven! What luck! What luck! I never thought I'd get a chance at you like this.

"I wonder how I'll kill you, you snake."

The man thought for a time and then an idea struck him.

"I know what I'll do. There's many in camp who like to get a crack at you, and with their help we'll do the job up brown."

His ruminations were broken by the three whistles of the craft.

They came low and piercing, and he listened for a moment.

Then he answered them.

A moment later there stepped into the hut the lieutenant of the outlaw band.

"What's this? Whom have you got there?" he questioned.

"Here, look at him and see if you don't recognize an old friend." The man struck a match and allowed it to shine on Carter's face.

"Great guns! Carter—Nick Carter!"

"Yes, I thought that would bring you up with a turn."

"But how did you catch him? How?"

"Why, it was easy."

"Easy to catch Carter?"

"Yes, I was sneaking to the shanty here, and as I got close I heard a shot and saw a man run out of it."

"Well, what then?"

"Oh, I sashaed around in the good old woods, and saw this lovely brute bending over a man on the ground.

"Purty soon he gets up and wanders back to this place.

"When he gets here I drops my gun on his head a sorter forceful like and he cashes in fer the present."

"How did you know it was Carter?"

"Well, he had a bit of blood on his nut and I lifted hat to see how much hurt he was, and his wig came ; then the beard came away and I found that it was old friend come to pay us a visit."

"And it's his last visit to any one; by to-morrow be in hell."

"What should we do with him? Let's kill him now."

"No! No! Not now."

"What'll we do with him?"

"I tell you what we'll do; you mount guard over him I will chase back to the camp and tell the chief; he a little grudge of his own to settle with him."

"All right, go ahead, but get a hustle on; I am more likely to drop a gun butt on his face if you don't. temptation is very great."

Saunders, who was the lieutenant, started back amp with all speed, knowing that he was the bearer the best news that had ever been brought in.

He knew that his chief would be overjoyed for a at Carter, and that the vengeance of all the crowd ld be sufficient to give the detective all that was ing to him.

The man who had been left on watch was thinking ome things and sat waiting impatiently the return the others.

He lighted his pipe and composed himself to wait, ng in the doorway.

The case of the detective was certainly a desperate .

Burning alive was about what the bandits would give n, and when Chick heard that he had been captured heart sank.

The chief rushed out of his tent and roared: "Get r guns, men. Get your guns and bring along axes."

The horses were saddled, and in the confusion re- ing from the hurried departure, Chick slipped off bserved into the darkness.

His horse was a fast one, and he did not spare it.

The others came more slowly, and when Chick ar- d at the shanty were a few minutes behind.

He gave the whistle signal and was answered.

On the gallop he rushed his horse up to the cabin and dismounted.

The guard laughed and said: "In a hurry to see m, eh?"

Then he took a match out of his pocket and struck it.

As he did so the butt of Chick's heavy Colt crashed on his head, and without a gurgle he sank on the body of the great detective.

Chick pulled him off.

"Nick! Nick!" he cried, in agonized tones.

The great detective's eyes flickered open slowly and he looked at the boy with a vacant gaze.

There was not a moment to lose.

Chick gathered him up in his arms and ran to his horse.

With difficulty he placed him in the saddle and jumped on behind.

Guiding the animal with one hand and holding his chief on with the other, he started for the edge of the woods.

In a moment or two they were a quarter of a mile or so away from the hut and going fast.

The rapid motion began to bring consciousness back to the stupefied man.

A few minutes later he suddenly stiffened up and sat his saddle.

Then he turned around, and as Chick saw he was conscious he spoke:

"It's all right, Nick; all right, old man!"

"Why, Chick, where did you come from?"

"From the camp, and I must get back there as soon as I can."

"All right, all right—I can walk now."

"But the woods are full of them, and they're after you."

"They are?"

"Yes, Saunders came to the camp and said that you were taken prisoner and the whole gang turned out; they intend to burn you to death."

"They do? That's cheerful!"

"Yes, and I want you to take the horse and get away."

"But I won't. If you lose your horse they will suspect you, and then you will get it."

"But what can we do?"

They had gone about three miles now.

"I'll tell you. Put me down here. I can find my way, and they will not get me, and you return to the camp, and when they ask why you were not with them say your horse got away."

"All right, that looks good."

Nick dismounted, and after a warm handclasp disappeared into the darkness.

Chick turned around and headed for camp as fast as he could.

Half an hour later the gang returned and were met by him on the way in. They angrily demanded where

he had been, and he answered that his horse had gotten away, and he had had to catch him before he could follow. They were too disappointed and mystified at the disappearance of Carter, and the finding of the man whose skull was fractured.

The chief was raging mad. "I knew we could not get that devil," he said; "he's the slickest detective in the whole world and he'll get us, sure."

His men tried to laugh off the depression which had fallen on them all, but it was a dismal failure.

They, too, felt that their lives were lost if the detective was not caught.

That night Nick Carter crawled into a drain in a railroad embankment and slept.

He wanted to read the papers, which he was overjoyed to find he still had, but decided to wait till morning.

CHAPTER X.

THE PACKET OF PAPERS.

At the earliest peep of day Carter was up and waiting for enough light to read.

When it came he opened the papers.

The first was a list of about twenty-five names.

At the top was: "The chief (I don't know his name: no one does)." Then followed the others, all by name, and after many of them their native town was written.

Carter understood what this was; it was a list of the men who were in the outlaw band. "My old friend, Red Bill, was getting ready to cover himself when the gang was pinched; this would help him a good deal when he turned State's evidence," mused Carter.

He turned to the other papers.

They were mainly lists of the sums of money taken by the outlaws, and the hiding place of each was marked on a rude penciled map of the woods.

Then there were several other papers.

These told of certain murders which had been done by different men in the gang, and Carter noticed that the chief figured seven times in the list.

The value of these papers was so great that Carter was afraid to carry them with him.

But realizing that he could not afford to lose them, he sought a place on his person to secrete them in.

He was about to take off his left boot and cut a slit in the sole when he noticed that one of the papers was written on on both sides. Eagerly he examined it.

The names were headed, "Scouts with the posses," and then followed five names, and after each one was the name of the party he was working with.

Carter was amazed at his good luck. He could not have done better if he had tried.

These little lists would help him clear up the business in a way which would reflect great credit to himself and make the reward well earned.

As he was thinking of this, the rumble of a distant train was heard. Carter realized that he was at the top of a steep grade, and that the engine would pass him slowly.

To think was to act.

As the train came by he caught one of the hand rails, and with an effort which would have not been possible for another man, swung himself onto the smoking car.

The conductor regarded him with suspicion, and was going to put him off, as Carter did not want to say who he was.

In the midst of the argument the general manager of the road, Hamilton Smith, came into the car.

Carter appealed to him and he was obdurate, too.

He said that there were too many suspicious characters about to allow men to board trains in the way.

"But, Mr. Smith, I was——"

"I don't care what you were. You cannot ride."

Carter stepped close to him and said, in a very low tone: "I am Carter—Nick Carter——"

"Oh, you are, eh?" answered Smith, in a low tone, looking keenly at Carter. "That's all right, conductor; he can ride; he's got a sick wife in town and wants to get to her."

The conductor turned away, muttering something about it being against the regulations.

Then Carter was asked into the private car at the end of the train, and as they went by the conductor Smith said he was taking the hobo in to give him a bite to eat.

"The old man's getting pretty kind-hearted these days," thought the conductor, but he said nothing; it was none of his business.

The general manager asked Nick a thousand or so questions, but the detective did not answer them.

"I cannot tell you yet how we are getting on," he said.

"Why?"

"So far both of us have only succeeded in nearly losing our lives."

"How was that?"

Carter related as much as he thought proper about

e business, and dwelt particularly on Chick's presence f mind when he rescued him. The general manager as very much interested and wanted to know when e grand round-up was to be.

"My parties have accomplished nothing, absolutely hing so far, except to get killed, and I am getting retty tired of it."

"Yes, they have had hard luck."

"And the whole country is laughing at us."

"Well, we'll turn the laugh the other way this week," mised Nick, smiling.

He was thinking of the invaluable lists he had taken m Red Bill's body, and whenever he did so he was ost sorry that he had killed a witness who would ve been a star at the trial when he turned State's idence.

Red Bill had certainly made up his mind to clear himself when he was caught, and it seemed a shame kill such a useful villain.

When the train pulled into the Omaha station, Nick rter left it as the crowd was getting off and was soon t in the city.

He knew that he could get no more information from ick, as there was no place he could meet him. He d another idea, however, and it was the one which ally was carried out.

He would commence to take up the men he was er, and would arrest the men who were scouting with e passes first.

Full of this idea, he went to his hotel and waited r night.

As he was looking over the papers and making a y of them, he was struck with something which he d not seen before.

On one of them it said: "There is a leak in the gen- l manager's office, but I don't know who it is."

This was all, but it explained a great deal.

He would stop that leak, and do so as soon as he uld.

t made little difference now, however, as he was g to take charge of the campaign and would do no ing in the office.

When night came he stole forth from the hotel and t to the general manager's house.

He found him at home, and Carter asked where the ferent parties were located.

Mr. Smith gave him a list, and thanking him, Carter arted.

He found that the Pinkerton crowd, about seventy strong, were encamped about ten miles away, and he made up his mind that they were the men he wanted.

There was another reason also; that party had for its guide the man whom Carter had seen enter the bandit camp.

He wanted that man, and he was sure that the fellow could give him some valuable information.

How to catch the outlaws without great loss of life Nick could not see. If he attacked them at their camp they would have all the chance in the world to make a desperate defense, and that meant that the detective's men would suffer.

That the desperadoes would fight wickedly and never surrender, he had not the slightest doubt.

They were all wanted for crimes which would bring them at least life imprisonment, and anything was preferable to that.

As he walked swiftly through the woods he thought of all these things, and when he reached the Pinkerton camp he was surprised at the little time it had taken him to get there.

He carefully reconnoitered the camp before going in, and was not surprised to see the scout he was looking for sneaking into it. Carter went in noiselessly and was standing by the fire when he was discovered.

An old Pinkerton man came up to him and nearly fainted at seeing that it was Carter.

Carter told him to keep quiet, and they both went into a tent. When there the great detective told about the spy scout, and the Pinkerton man boiled over with rage.

"Let's go out and get him."

"All right. Come on, but be quiet."

The men sneaked to the tent of the spy.

Outside they waited and listened.

There was no sound from within.

Carter raised the flap and they both entered.

The man was sleeping soundly, and before he was well awake he was tied up and gagged.

Then Carter went through him and found what he hoped for.

In his boot there was a packet done up in the yellow oiled silk Carter had seen before.

The Pinkerton man awakened several of the detectives and told them to mount guard over the prisoner.

Then Carter and the old man went back to the tent. Here the paper was opened.

Carter read it:

"Be as far away from the old place as possible. At the curve the six-forty train will be attended to. Get your gang as far away as you can. THE CHIEF."

The detectives looked at one another in amazement.

"What luck! what luck!" they gasped.

In a moment or two they had recovered enough to talk intelligibly.

"That settles the matter. This is the time we will do the ambushing ourselves, and——"

"And we'll break up the gang."

The thought of it caused the Pinkerton man to laugh with joy.

"Where does that express pass the curve?"

"I don't know, but I'll find out where it is."

Realizing that the next day would settle the whole business, the men went to sleep with light hearts.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HOLD-UP.

Before daylight the express was flagged at the station before the last run into town.

The Pinkerton man and half of his men got on board and the train started.

They were armed to the teeth, and the passengers who were in their berths were told not to get up.

Carter, with the rest of the force, scattered themselves through the woods along the track. Each man had his Winchester and revolvers and lay where he could see the rails.

They had been instructed to watch for the bandits, and when they came to let them through and then to gather as close to them as they could. It was as though Carter was spreading a net for them, and when they came the net was to be closed and the birds caught.

It was a weird scene when the dawn came.

There were grim, silent men lurking in the shadows of all the trees and behind bowlders.

Carter himself was at the point of the curve where the hold-up was to take place.

Expectantly they waited, while the sun slowly rose.

As the first bright rays penetrated the darkness of the woods there came the sound of muffled hoof beats and men's voices.

Carter realized that his quarry had arrived.

Riding two and two the outlaws, led by their chief and Saunders, came nearer and nearer.

A short distance away from the track they all mounted.

Carter, from his shelter, saw the chief, tall, dark forbidding, giving orders.

The men sauntered to the railroad track and stre themselves along it.

They spread out to about the length of a train, Carter saw the chief take several sticks of dynamite of his pockets and place them on the ground.

He stood for a time talking with Saunders, and the lieutenant crossed the rails and lay down in edge of the embankment.

The situation was getting on Carter's nerves.

It was hard to wait, and his men all felt the way.

Just when it was becoming unbearable there wa faint whistle in the distance.

The tension was broken, and the bandits al cheered.

They, too, were glad that the wait was ended.

This was to be the last hold-up.

After this was over they were to scatter to t homes and do their best to hide the fact that they w wanted by the police.

And each of them would be almost a rich man; plunder would be shared, and they would quit the life.

The oncoming express was said to have nearl hundred thousand on it also, and that, combined w their other hauls, would make nearly half a million be divided among about thirty of them.

While the bandits dreamed these pleasant drea and waited for their prey, Carter's men were slo creeping nearer them.

In a short while they had got their positions, and bandits were surrounded by a chain of deadly enem which was stronger than steel.

The roar of the train could be heard now.

The engine was laboring hard to make the st grade and was puffing. Every puff seemed to find echo in the hearts of the waiting men, and the suspe was terrible.

The express was in sight now, and the outlaws w waiting like beasts of prey to spring.

The train was almost up now.

The outlaw chief whistled shrilly, and in a sec the track was lined with Winchesters.

At that moment Nick Carter shot once, and his m dashed to the track. The car windows were thro

ken, and the Pinkerton men commenced shooting. The outlaws realized that they were ambushed this time and fought desperately.

They had no chance.

Outnumbered, and with no cover to fight from, they were pelted by a merciless rain of bullets.

Nick Carter found that the bandit leader was nowhere to be seen. He had seen him jump onto the engine, and guessed that he had fled to the woods on the other side.

But how he had gotten through the detectives was a mystery.

Seeing that it meant death to try and continue the fight, the remainder of the bandits gave in.

They were a sorry-looking lot of men.

The fire from the detectives had been deadly, while that of the desperadoes was scattering.

The surprise had been so complete that they had lost their aim in the flurry, and seeing their comrades stricken down, had rattled them.

Nick Carter was rushing about, trying to see if any of the wounded men was the chief, when he heard a call from the woods.

It was the call that only he and Chick used to one another.

He rushed to where it came from and found the young detective holding a man down who was struggling desperately.

Nick helped him and found, to his joy, that it was the chief of the bandits. The detectives called for help and men came.

The chief was tied up and placed on the train with his followers.

Of the entire band, there were only five who had not been wounded. Eleven were killed and about ten wounded.

The detectives had not come off entirely unscathed. Seven of their men were wounded and one killed.

After all the bandits were carefully secured, the detectives gathered in the smoking-room of one of the Pullmans.

"How did you get the chief, Chick?" asked Nick.

"Why I sneaked into the woods when the train whistled, so as not to get plugged in the fight, and when the shooting commenced came close to see, and the chief was in such a hurry to make his getaway that he ran into me."

"And you took him?"

"Yes, that's about it; he gave me a run for my money, though."

"For the second time, eh?"

The rest of the way into Omaha was spent in relating anecdotes about the robber gang and in guessing who their chief was.

Nick Carter thought he recognized him, but he was not sure.

When the great news became known the people in Omaha and the whole country went wild with the joy.

The telegraph wires hummed with the messages sent telling of it, and Nick Carter's name was on every lip.

To complete the job, Nick had sent a party from town under command of Chick, and they had gathered in the cook of the outlaws and their spare horses and camping materials.

There was one thing which had not been done yet, and that was to apprehend the spies in the four other posses.

Carter sent Pinkerton men to each party, with orders to get these men, and as they started as soon as the train reached town, they were all caught.

The first news of the capture of the outlaws was carried to these posses by the men who were after the spies, and so they had no difficulty.

That night the citizens of Omaha planned a monster celebration in honor of Nick and Chick Carter, but when they sent committees to find the detectives they were gone.

"What's the use of all this play to the grand stand? I don't like it," said Nick.

"No, and I don't, either," answered Chick.

"What shall we do? Get out of town or disguise ourselves?"

"I speak for the latter—it will be more fun."

So the two star performers were absent as stars, but were present as very interested spectators of the city's celebration.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OFFICE OF THE GENERAL MANAGER.

The next morning two gentlemen who looked as though they had just come off the hay wagon, asked to see the general manager.

The call boy looked at them with scorn, and as he delivered their message to Mr. Smith, added: "They look like hayseeds, sir. I guess they're looking for damages for a cow wot was killed."

"Thank you for the information, but will you kindly show them in?"

The general manager's voice was bitingly polite.

The two farmers came in, and in an uncouth manner stood and held their hats.

"Well, what can I do for you?" asked Mr. Smith, in no very gentle tones.

"Nothing very much. We just want to collect a small bill you owe us."

"I owe you?"

"Yes, siree, that's what I said."

"What's it for? How much?"

"Only a lettel trifle—about a hundred thousand dol——"

"A hundred thousand dollars! Why, man, you are crazy."

Then both the farmers laughed.

When they did so, the general manager began to wake up.

"My heavens! it's the Carters—I'm so glad to see you."

And he rose and clasped both their hands warmly.

"Where were you both last night? I couldn't find you anywhere."

"Watching the show."

"Then how was it that you were not seen? Not even the Pinkerton men saw you."

"We were dressed this way, and I fancy even you yourself could not have recognized us."

"No, I certainly would not."

"But we are here on business and not to talk."

"About the reward?"

"Not yet. I want to give you some documents which will be of great value in the trial."

"What are they?"

Carter placed his hand in his inside pocket and drew out the papers he had taken from Red Bill.

"Here are the lists of the men who composed the bandits and in another place you will find a list of their crimes."

"But where did you get this?"

"I took it off the body of Red Bill."

"When you were forced to shoot him?"

"Yes, that was the time."

"How did he happen to have it?"

"He evidently expected to get caught, and it was his provision for a rainy day; he meant to turn State's evidence."

"It's a shame he was killed; we could use him."

"Yes, but I had to do it."

"Well, Mr. Carter, is there anything else which you want to say to me?"

"No, sir; that is all."

"Well, I want to settle up with you."

"That suits me."

"All right; the reward aggregates one hundred t[h]sand dollars."

"I know that. It is a great deal."

"Yes, it is; but you nearly lost your life to earn and bestowed a lasting blessing on the community w[h]you caught those men."

"I tell you what I want you to do, Mr. Smith."

"I'll do it. What is it?"

"I want you to take fifty thousand of that rew[a]and divide it among the men who were with us in [t]big fight."

"But, Mr. Carter——"

"There is no 'but,' sir. We want that done, d[o]we, Chick?"

"Yes, Nick; it is only fair to them."

"Mr. Carter, my esteem for you grows eve[ry]minute."

"I thank you, sir."

"And I am proud to have ever met you.

"That's very kind of you."

The general manager went to his desk, and in a [m]ute returned with a check in his hands.

"Here it is, Mr. Carter."

"Thank you, sir; I think we'll say good-by."

"Good-by, both of you, and may the best of l[uck]dog your footsteps as long as you live."

The two detectives shook hands with him and pass[ed]out of the office and went to their hotel.

We will leave them there packing their things to t[ake]the night train, which, thanks to their efforts, was ab[le]to go through without being held up.

The bandit gang were tried and all received a se[n]tence of life imprisonment, with the exception of the[ir]chief.

He was sentenced to the electric chair, and he m[et]his death in the same cold-blooded way he had live[d]his life.

Thus did Nick Carter, assisted by his young pupi[l]single-handed, catch the band of desperadoes which ha[d]terrorized the whole of that section of the country a[nd]had practically tied up the Union Pacific system. The[y]did in less than a week what it had cost two hundre[d]and fifty men nearly a month of constant trial and [a]constant failure to try and do.

THE END.

Dr. Donelson, of Philadelphia, was the greate[st]poison expert in the land, but he was more than that-[-]he was a clever and unscrupulous villain, although e[n]tirely unsuspected, until Nick Carter got on his tra[il].It was a battle of giants, and how Nick won out [is]most thrillingly narrated in the next issue, No. 37[0]entitled "Nick Carter's Diamond Trail: or, The Pur[-]suit of the Lucky Clew."

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